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Carol X Weakley 10/16/2006 03:09:38 PM From DB/Inbox: Carol X Weakley

Cable
Text:

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 04042

SIPDIS

CXTelA:

ACTION: POL
INFO: CONS ECON IPSC DCM DAO AMB AID ADM RSO PD IMO
RES

DISSEMINATION: POL
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: CDA:GCRETZ
DRAFTED: POL:MCKEAYS
CLEARED: POL/C:MJSIEVERS, DAO:DO'MEARA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 004042

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, PM
PENTAGON FOR OSD ISRAEL DESK (ANDERSON)
NSC FOR LOGERFO
JOINT STAFF FOR J-5
HQ USEUCOM FOR ECJ5-E (KLOTHE)
H PASS TO SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/12/2016
TAGS: PREL PTER MASS PGOV OREP KWBG LE IR SY IS
SUBJECT: CODEL WARNER'S MEETING WITH ISRAELI DEFMIN PERETZ
FOCUSSES ON WAR WITH HIZBALLAH, MISSILE DEFENSE

REF: A. TEL AVIV 3909
 1B. TEL AVIV 4001

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Gene A. Cretz.
Reason: 1.4 (b) (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) CODEL Warner's October 3 meeting with Israel Defense Minister Amir Peretz focused on lessons learned from Israel's war with Hizballah in southern Lebanon, and missile defense. (Reftels report on the CODEL's meetings with Prime Minister Olmert and Foreign Minister Livni.) Accompanied by MOD Director General Gabi Ashkenazi (MGEN, Res.), MOD POL-MIL Bureau Head Amos Gilad (MGEN, Res.) and Military Advisor BGEN Eitan Dangot, Peretz expressed thanks for U.S. support for Israel during the war in Lebanon, stressing that Israeli soldiers "came out winners," and that Hizballah learned a hard lesson. Peretz acknowledged, however, that Israeli society is divided over Israel's performance during the war, and that the war has not resolved what Israel sees as the problem of having to work with "sovereign but irresponsible" neighbors (e.g., in his view, Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority.)

¶12. (C) After the DefMin departed for a ceremony he was required to attend, MOD DG Ashkenazi reviewed the Israeli MOD's current thinking on missile defense, noting that the MOD plans to conduct a study over the next two months and recommend a way forward on countering the short-range missile/rocket threat. Ashkenazi said that Israel is considering laser-based missile defense systems of the kind researched jointly by the U.S. and Israel, and is also working on its own kinetic missile defense system. The CODEL requested to be informed of the results of the MOD study, and indicated an interest in revisiting joint research on chemical laser-based missile defense systems as possible solutions to the threats posed to Israel by Katyusha and Kassam rockets. END SUMMARY.

PERETZ THANKS THE U.S. FOR SUPPORT

¶13. (C) Peretz opened the meeting by expressing thanks for America's support for Israel in its war with Hizballah: "Israel owes much to the U.S. for its support. I want to thank the Ambassador, your embassy, your military representatives, and General Dayton. Israel recognizes that there would be no military support, if there were no political support." Peretz added that he appreciated the USG's approach to the Middle East that views it as one region, observing that events in one part of the region affect events elsewhere.

PERETZ ON THE WAR WITH HIZBALLAH

¶14. (C) Peretz said that there is no doubt that Hizballah paid a heavy price in its war with Israel. Hizballah will consider more seriously whether to attack Israel again. Alluding to the criticism he and the IDF have faced on how the war was managed, Peretz said that Israel, like the U.S. and other democracies, has the tendency to view events either as glasses half full, or half empty: "This is the weakness of democracy, but we prefer it to any other kind of regime." It was impossible, he stressed, to allow Hizballah to take Israeli soldiers hostage and leave the situation in a deadlock.

¶15. (C) Comparing Lebanese PM Siniora with Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas, Peretz suggested that both leaders are weak and refuse to be held accountable for the actions of their peoples. Peretz recalled that the town he was mayor of, Sderot, had been hit numerous times by Kassam rockets launched from the Gaza Strip. Each time a rocket was launched, the IDF sought to strike its launcher. When confronted with this situation, Peretz claimed that Abbas blamed Hamas for the launches. Hamas, the DefMin said, would then blame the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which would then finger another group. Peretz said that as a result of this, Israel agreed only to hit missile launchers. Switching to the war in Lebanon, he said that Israel faced the same situation there: PM Siniora controlled Beirut, Hizballah launched its rockets, and Siniora subsequently denied responsibility. "At last," the DefMin stressed, "Everyone understands the connection between sovereignty and responsibility."

¶16. (C) Responding to the senators' questions about lessons learned from the war, Peretz said that one problem the GOI faced was having so many citizens confined to bomb shelters in northern Israel. He explained that Israelis are used to having their army fight, and have long believed that the IDF knows how to win wars. Unfortunately, he said, the Katyushas -- while being "very primitive instruments" with short ranges -- had a significant impact on Israel. He claimed that the IDF destroyed most of Hizballah's long-range missiles.

¶17. (C) Peretz said that Israel needs a solution for short-range rockets like the Kassams launched from the Gaza Strip. Observing that the "primitive" Kassam rockets

"paralyze" whole towns, he suggested that they have become a strategic threat with far-reaching implications for Israel. Israel, he said, will not be able to speak about convergence (e.g., withdrawing settlements and outposts from the West Bank) without finding a solution to the Kassam threat: "Until we do this, there is no way that we can talk about returning the West Bank."

¶ 8. (C) Peretz suggested that Israel's soldiers "came out winners" from the war with Hizballah, and that the MOD plans to work on a new war-fighting doctrine based on its experience in southern Lebanon. He claimed that as a result of Israel's performance in the war, the Syrians are impressed with Israel's capabilities to fight a guerrilla war. The Defense Minister added that the war with Hizballah demonstrated the important convergence between intelligence and fighting capability.

DISCUSSION ON MISSILE DEFENSE

¶ 9. (C) Senator Warner responded by recalling that he had visited the Israeli MOD in February 1991 when the IDF successfully knocked down a SCUD missile launched from Iraq. He suggested that the U.S. and Israel should look more closely at potential missile defense systems "to invest in" in the short-term. Senator Levin promised continued U.S. support for Israel's Arrow missile defense system, saying, "We need the Arrow system as much as you do." Senator Sessions noted that his subcommittee concerns itself with missile defense, and that the U.S. is conducting research and development on a laser-based missile defense system. He asked the Defense Minister how Israel evaluates U.S. research in this area. Senator Warner added that Congress may return its attention to work conducted to date on chemical lasers.

¶ 10. (C) Responding for the Defense Minister -- who had to depart in order to attend a memorial ceremony for Israeli soldiers killed in the 1973 Yom Kippur War -- MOD Director General Gabi Ashkenazi (MGEN Res.) recalled that Israel had worked with the U.S. on the Nautilus tactical high-energy laser (THEL) missile defense system as a possible solution to the threat posed by Katyusha rockets to Israel. Ashkenazi noted that U.S. support for the Nautilus project had been terminated in 2005. He stated that Israel could rely on a laser-based system to defeat Katyushas, or a kinetic kill system that uses small bullets. Ashkenazi acknowledged that some progress has been made using chemical lasers, and said that Israel is awaiting a U.S. briefing on this. He said the U.S. Army has also made some progress with solid state lasers. Both, he admitted, are susceptible to weather, adding that weather conditions are bad in northern Israel for almost half the year. Ashkenazi said that Israel is concerned by the environmental problems that chemical lasers pose.

¶ 11. (C) Ashkenazi said that the MOD believes it will be able to hit a Katyusha rocket with its kinetic "mini-Arrow" system within two years. The advantage of this system, he claimed, is that it leaves a low footprint and is unaffected by the weather.

¶ 12. (C) Ashkenazi said that the MOD is now studying missile defense options and will come up with a proposed way ahead within two months. The way ahead will also consider manufacturing issues, and will propose a budget. The MOD DG told the senators that Israel is very satisfied with U.S. cooperation in all areas of missile defense. He said he intends to discuss the matter further during his October 23-24 visit to Washington. He thanked the senators for the funding support the U.S. is providing for the Arrow missile defense system, and expressed his hope that in two years, Israel will have a system that can protect a small town of 5-10 square kilometers.

¶ 13. (C) Ashkenazi said Israel was hit by Katyushas and Iranian and Syrian-origin medium- and long-range missiles

during the war with Hizballah. He claimed that experts maintain that Israel needs two missile defense systems: one for short-range missiles and rockets, and one for medium-range missiles and rockets. He said that the MOD wants one system, and is concentrating now on countering the short-range missile/rocket threat. Israel, he said, can already address the threat posed by medium to long-range missiles. He observed that Katyusha barrages pose a particular challenge: Even if 80 percent of the incoming Katyushas are hit, the Israeli public will still feel that its missile defense system has failed. He noted that during the war with Hizballah, only 25 percent of the Katyushas hit urban areas. Ashkenazi added that Israel has a radar system that can differentiate between missiles that pose a threat to populated areas, and those that will land in unpopulated areas.

¶14. (C) Senator Sessions said that the U.S. would be very interested in the results of the MOD's study. Senator Warner added that Congress may have to review again the chemical laser option, despite earlier objections due to its cost. Ashkenazi stressed Israel's determination to find a solution to the short-range rocket threat within two years.

¶15. (U) CODEL Warner did not have an opportunity to clear on this cable.

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CRETZ